

THE SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST
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This homily is R-rated. If we paid attention to what we were doing when we received Holy communion, we would prepare more carefully and approach more cautiously. Because, when we eat the Body and Blood of Christ, we are engaging in an act of cannibalism.

True, it is *sacramental* cannibalism; but it is, nonetheless, a *ritual* cannibalism, and not a symbolic embrace or toasted bread. And in eating Christ's Body, might we consider that perhaps we could be violating the most basic taboo of every culture? The purpose of the taboo against cannibalism is to establish that degree of separation necessary for societies to live together. Taboos guarantee the privacy, the intimacy, the personal space of each individual. The taboo against cannibalism assure that the individual does not get eaten alive by the tribe,

All this sounds primitive to us civilized people. However, we are not so civilized that we refrain from eating each other alive. After all, what is "cancel culture" anyway except cannibalism by another name? Getting back to the main subject, though: human nature is raw when reduced to survival instincts.

An Air Force plane carrying Uruguay's National Rugby Team crashed in a snow-capped peak of the inaccessible Andes Mountains. Everyone was presumed dead by the authorities and the search was called off as bad weather took hold. It turned out that there were survivors, though many also died of injuries in the course of time. No way to call for help. They could only wait, and likely wait for death. As starvation and frostbite set in, survivors took to drying sliced strips of their friends' flesh in the sun and eating it. As another survivor slowly dies, he tells the others, "When I die, I want you to eat my flesh. That way my death will not be in vain, it will keep you alive. That night, he dragged himself into the cold, exposing himself to death. The

next day, his friends gather around, give thanks for his kindness and consume his body. His death was seen as a sacrifice that transformed cannibalism into communion.

However justified the survivors were in eating flesh, the act shocked and repulsed those 16 who lived to tell the tale. So why did Jesus give us permission, even command us to eat his body and drink his blood? Why did he go so far as to threaten us with death if we did not eat his flesh?

Recall the purpose of the taboo: to guarantee a safe degree of distance between people; it is to assure that one is not absorbed by the other. But that is precisely what Jesus wants: to be as close, as intimate as humanly and physically possible. And to gather all of his friends into a lesser degree of separation than secular society allows. A ritual kiss or toast would not have effected the desired intimacy. So, he permitted, commanded us to consume his body. But to make the cannibalism more palatable, he allowed his body to remain disguised as bread.

Which allows us to think, we believe it is the Body of Christ, but it really is bread. Absolutely not! Just the opposite is true. It looks like bread, but it really is the Body of Christ. And not just in a sacramental in a sacramental sense. Modern science knows that all matter is interchangeable: every rock, flower, animal, and human came from the same, one Big Divine Bang. Everything became what it became from the same explosion of energy. Bread can become flesh if God wills it.

There's more to the miracle. We do not eat the Galilean body of Jesus; we eat the glorified body of the resurrected Christ. We don't know exactly what this means, but consider this: science tells us that matter and energy are convertible. They are the same stuff in different states. So, what if the resurrected body of Christ is the physical body of Jesus in the form of

divine energy? That would mean you and I are energized by the glorified body of Christ. There is no degree of separation from him in receiving him.

We are reaching the limits of language. The philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, says of mystery that of what we know nothing, we must remain silent. Yet the heart impels us to talk about the inscrutable Lord.

So, priests of Jesus Christ dare to talk about the Body of Christ in the vulgar terms of cannibalism to jolt us into realizing that nothing need separates us from him. He is bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh.

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